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Health and Social Services Group



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

To: Nick Ramsay AM,
Chair, Public Accounts Committee

5 March 2019

Dear Mr Ramsay,

Thank you for your letter of 5 February seeking clarifications to our response to the Public Accounts Committee's report on the costs and value for money of public services for care experienced children.

I am replying on behalf of our Accounting Officer, Andrew Goodall, Director of Health and Social Services, and will address each of your points in turn.

Recommendation 1

Following the commencement of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act in April 2016, data relating to care experienced children and young people changed. To ensure the data we collect for children and young people remains comprehensive, fit for purpose and robust, the Performance and Improvement Framework for Children has been developed together with local authorities and partners for introduction from April 2020.

The scope of the Performance and Improvement Framework for Children is focussed on the data and activity of local authority children's services. The scope of the Improving Outcomes for Children programme is much broader; covering the full range of policy portfolios, in addition to social services, that impact on the lives of care experienced children. The performance indicators developed by the Ministerial Advisory Group seek to identify activity and improvements in outcomes across these additional areas, such as education, health and housing, to help provide an enhanced dataset of outcomes for care experienced children.

Both these approaches have been informed by the views of young people. The Children's Commissioner's office has been involved in the development of the Framework. A number of third sector organisations representing the voice of the child such as Voices from Care, Children in Wales, The Fostering Network and NSPCC have been closely involved in the development of the performance indicators as members of the Ministerial Advisory Group.

Recommendation 2

As the Committee notes, the new arrangements for the Pupil Development Grant for Looked After Children (PDG-LAC) will come into effect from April this year. The recently published independent evaluation focussed on our current arrangements and its findings have been used to inform the development of the new approach. As with all elements of the Pupil Development Grant, systems are in place to monitor the operation of PDG-LAC. This includes half-termly



meetings between officials in the Education Directorate, the Welsh Government's Raising Attainment Advocate and the relevant leads in the four regional education consortia. These meetings will form part of the ongoing monitoring of the implementation and operation of the new PDG-LAC arrangements.

Recommendation 3

Since our response to the Committee, my team has been considering how we can best publicise the work of the Improving Outcomes for Children programme and its Ministerial Advisory Group in line with the Committee's recommendation. As previously referenced, we will be updating the information contained on our Welsh Government web pages to better highlight the membership, operation and implementation of the programme. To ensure sufficient transparency and accountability of the Ministerial Advisory Group meetings themselves, we will commit to publishing future meeting summaries on the Welsh Government website.

Since our response, we feel there is much more information that could be included about the programme to inform and shape good social work practice across children's services. Social Care Wales has agreed to develop a specific learning and development portal on its website to highlight the activity of the programme and the good practice that has been emerging to help shape the continuing professional development of those working with care experienced children.

Recommendation 4

The development of a national approach to commissioning will be overseen by a project working group consisting of key stakeholders including those involved in implementation of the National Fostering Framework and the Children's Residential Care Task and Finish Group. The cost of placements and the link to outcomes will be included in this commissioning. The proposed timescale for this work is set out below in response to Recommendation 6.

Recommendation 5

It is important to re-emphasise, where there is a placement move or breakdown, a review of a child's care and support plan should be instigated as routine practice. In recognition of the evidence heard, Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) has confirmed they will specifically consider the effectiveness and frequency of end placement reviews at future inspections. CIW has in place a rolling programme of inspections with local authorities where the evidence heard at Committee can be tested. Any changes to the Part 6 Code of Practice will be undertaken as part of any wider refresh of the Code that is undertaken, particularly in light of the legislative changes made under the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act.



Recommendation 6

We believe our timetable for developing a national approach to placement commissioning is ambitious and realistic. We will establish a project working group in March to help us draw up a specification and commission a scoping study. Part 1 (September to December 2019) will collate evidence on placement patterns within local authorities, pressures on placement availability and costs, drivers behind high costs of placements and value for money, and the impact of commissioning decisions on outcomes for children. Part 2 (January to March 2020) will use the outcomes from the research to information recommendations for a national approach to commissioning. It will consider the various arrangements currently in place, and the real and potential contribution of various partners including the National Commissioning Board, the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru, and the Regional Partnership Boards.

The timescales for implementing the national approach will depend on the recommendations of the scoping study, the extent to which the new approach uses the existing mechanisms or develops new ones, and whether it is appropriate to adopt a phased approach or aim for a definite implementation date. In any event we expect implementation to begin in 2020-21.

Recommendation 7

Although the transparency of spending across the range of services involved in the care of looked after children can not be achieved through tracking funding allocated via the Revenue Support Grant, we have committed to look at placement costs. We will take forward a piece of work to scope a research commission across the public sector, to look at health, housing and education costs. To enable findings to be relevant on a looked after child population basis any research would require a large sample size due to the individualised nature of care and support. It will also need to factor in that health boards deliver services according to need rather than population groups so does not disaggregate spend specifically for looked after children.

Recommendation 8

Arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the national approach to placement commissioning will form part of the development and implementation of the new approach.

Recommendation 9

I can assure the Committee that we are committed to ensuring local authorities spend the £5m allocation as originally intended. This is a significant investment by Welsh Government. We have made it clear that the recurrent £5m allocation is designed for the delivery of local authority edge of care services to support vulnerable families and help reduce the need for children to enter care. The Improving Outcomes for Children Ministerial Advisory Group continues to provide oversight in this area. To provide additional assurance, I will write to local authorities to ask them to account for the funding in the 2018/19 financial year.



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Recommendation 10

I am pleased you welcome the additional £15m allocated Regional Partnership Boards to help safely reduce the need for children to enter care. We will of course keep the Committee updated on the outcomes this investment will have on the children and young people it is designed to support.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'AH', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

ALBERT HEANEY
DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES AND INTEGRATION